



**CAPITALIZING ON STRENGTHS
QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE**



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Capitalizing on Strengths

People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.

-Dale Carnegie

Developing Strengths

As leaders, we are challenged to help our team members be the very best they can be. With that in mind, leaders often look for developmental opportunities or things they can help team members fix. This often starts with a gap analysis where they determine the difference between the level of skill or talent someone has in a particular area and what is possible. Seems like a noble leadership strategy, right? Consider the research below before you decide.

The University of Nebraska did a study on improving reading speed. The best teachers, of course, got the best results. But, the outstanding results were achieved by the best teachers working with the best speed readers. Poor readers started at 90 words per minute and after training, coaching and practice they made modest gains to 150 words per minute. The top speed readers started at 350 words per minute and made gains as high as 2900 words per minute! The results surprised everyone. Even the most experienced researchers expected the poorest readers to make the most improvement. This is an example of why leaders might consider more focus on developing team member strengths. After all, we can't expect every team member to be really great at everything. So, we should help them improve the natural talents they already possess.

Address Developmental Opportunities

To be clear, I am not suggesting that you ignore developmental opportunities. Instead, you should help team members address them on a very individualized basis.

For example, if the gap analysis mentioned above shows a team member needs help with written communication, consider the following before deciding how to address this issue for this individual:

1. Does the team member like to write? Perhaps they enjoy writing, but have never really had an opportunity to learn to do it well. If this is the case, written communication is a potential new strength area. Research shows that people often excel at skills they enjoy doing. So, investing in a writing skills class and assigning more writing to that individual is a good idea. Just make sure he or she is teamed up with a good proofreader until his or her skills are honed.
2. If the team member does not enjoy writing, consider whether or not that skill is critical to the job. Is it a function that could be delegated elsewhere? If so, this frees the person up to maximize his or her natural skills and talents.

In both scenarios you gain the added advantage of an employee who will be happier with his or her job!

If you are intrigued with this topic, I highly recommend that you read the book, **Soar with Your Strengths** by Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson.
